

# TOBACCO

## Context

Tobacco use is the single most important preventable cause of death in the United States, accounting for one out of every six deaths. Smoking is a major risk factor for heart disease, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and cancers of the lung, larynx, pharynx, mouth, esophagus, pancreas, and bladder. Many efforts have been made to target teens and young adults to inform them about the dangers of smoking and to keep them from starting. Similarly, new laws have been passed to make it harder for teens to get tobacco products. Despite these efforts, considerable numbers of teens still smoke or use tobacco.

The YRBS asked a series of questions about teen tobacco use, including whether students smoke, when they started and how much they smoke. The survey also asks students about the difficulties that they faced purchasing tobacco products and whether they used chewing tobacco or snuff.

## Highlights

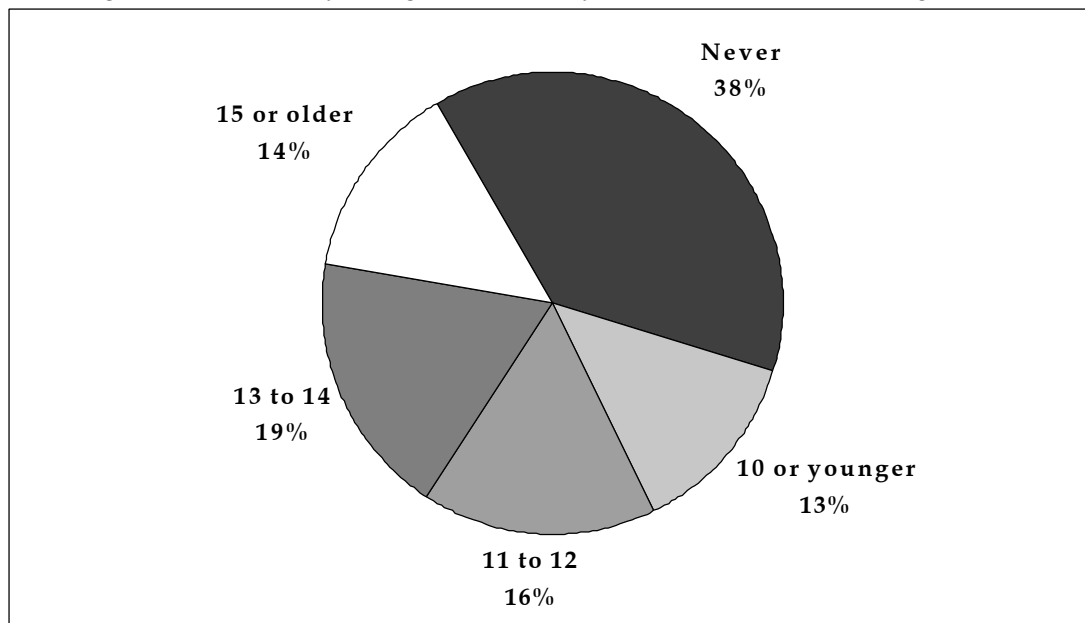
- Thirty-eight percent of students reported smoking at least once in the past month.
- Wisconsin students who are current smokers are more likely to report smoking on 20 or more of the past 30 days than the national average.
- Incidence of current smoking increased between 1993 and 1999 from 32 percent to 38 percent.
- The percentage of students who had ever smoked who have tried to quit smoking increased substantially between 1993 and 1999.
- Having an adult smoker in the home significantly affected nearly every measure of tobacco use among high school students.

## General Prevalence Rates

Nearly four in ten students reported never smoking a whole cigarette in their life (see Figure 1). Of those who had ever smoked a cigarette over half had their first cigarette between the ages of 11 and 14. Thirty-eight percent of students reported smoking at least one cigarette in the past 30 days. By comparison, the 1997 Wisconsin Behavioral Risk Factor Survey classified 23 percent of adults as “current” smokers<sup>1</sup> (Bureau of Health Information, 1998). More than four out of ten students who reported smoking at all in the past 30 days (or 17 percent of all students), said that they had smoked every day (see Figure 2). Of those that smoked at all in the past 30 days, nearly two-thirds (or 25 percent of all students) said that they smoked five or fewer cigarettes per day<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 3). Sixteen percent (or six percent of all students) smoked more than a half pack of cigarettes per day. Seventeen percent reported smoking on school property at least once in the past 30 days. Over half of the students who reported ever having smoked a whole cigarette said that they had tried to quit smoking. Likewise, six in ten students who reported having smoked on at least one day in the past 30 said that they had tried to quit smoking. Interestingly, a recent study of high school parents found that nearly nine out of ten thought it was unlikely that their child smokes cigarettes (Bogenschneider, et al., 1996).

**Figure 1. Age of Smoking Initiation**

Percentage of all students by the age at which they smoked their first whole cigarette.

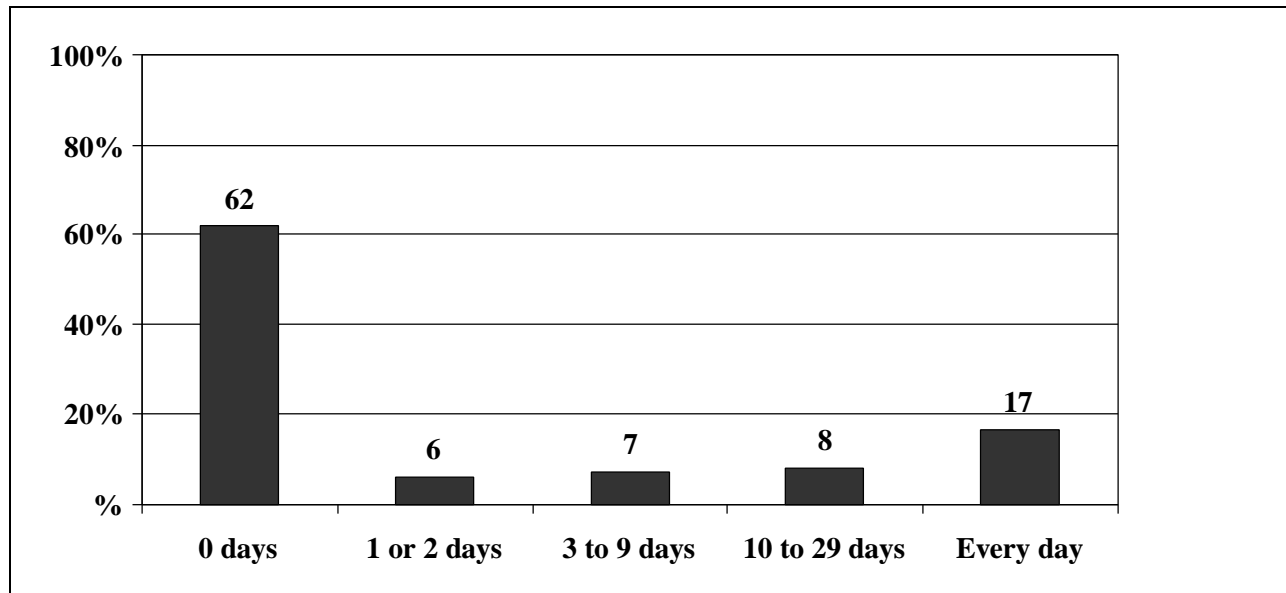


<sup>1</sup> Defined as those who have smoked more than 100 cigarettes in their lifetime who said they currently smoke. Care should be taken because questions from the two surveys do not match exactly.

<sup>2</sup> On the days when they smoked.

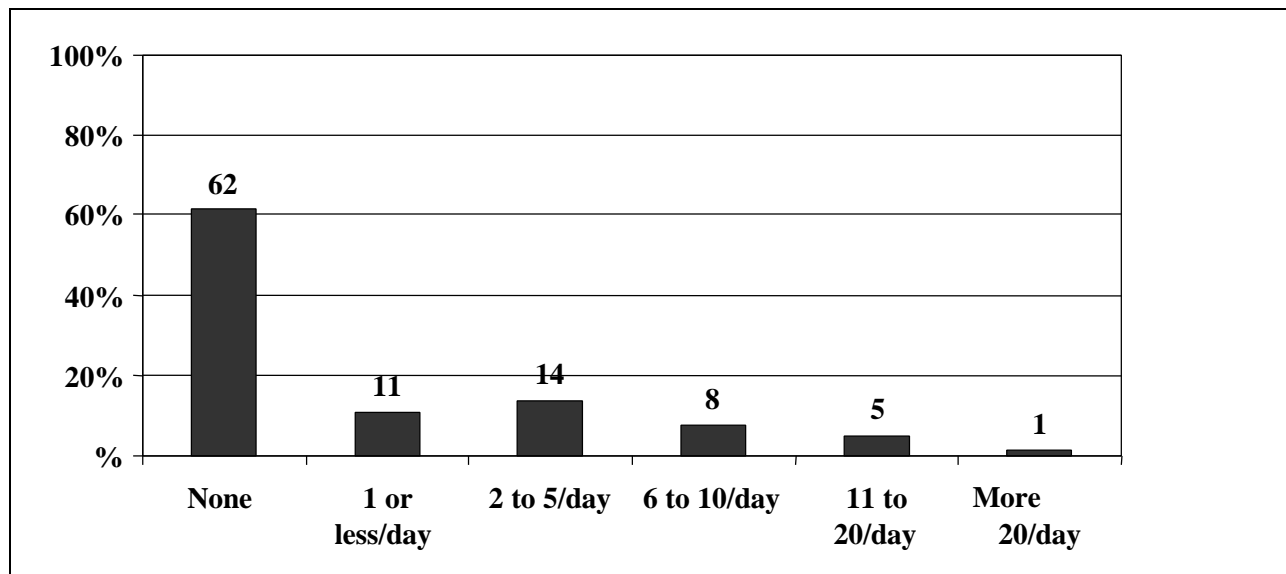
**Figure 2. Smoking Frequency**

Percentage of all students by the number of days in the past 30 on which they smoked.



**Figure 3. Smoking Volume**

Percentage of all students by the number of cigarettes they smoked on the days when they smoked in the past 30.



Despite legislation making it illegal for people under 18 to purchase cigarettes, most students who smoked either had someone else buy them, bought their own cigarettes at a store or gas station, or borrowed them. Combined, these methods accounted for over four-fifths of students' cigarettes. Very few students (less than one percent) bought cigarettes from vending machines.

Eighteen percent of all students reported smoking cigars, cigarillos or little cigars in the past 30 days. Of these, 63 percent report smoking them on only one or two days of the past 30. Thirteen percent of all

students used chewing tobacco or snuff in the past 30 days. Of these, half used chewing tobacco or snuff on five or fewer days during the past 30. Fifteen percent of chewing tobacco or snuff users reported using it every day in the past 30 days.

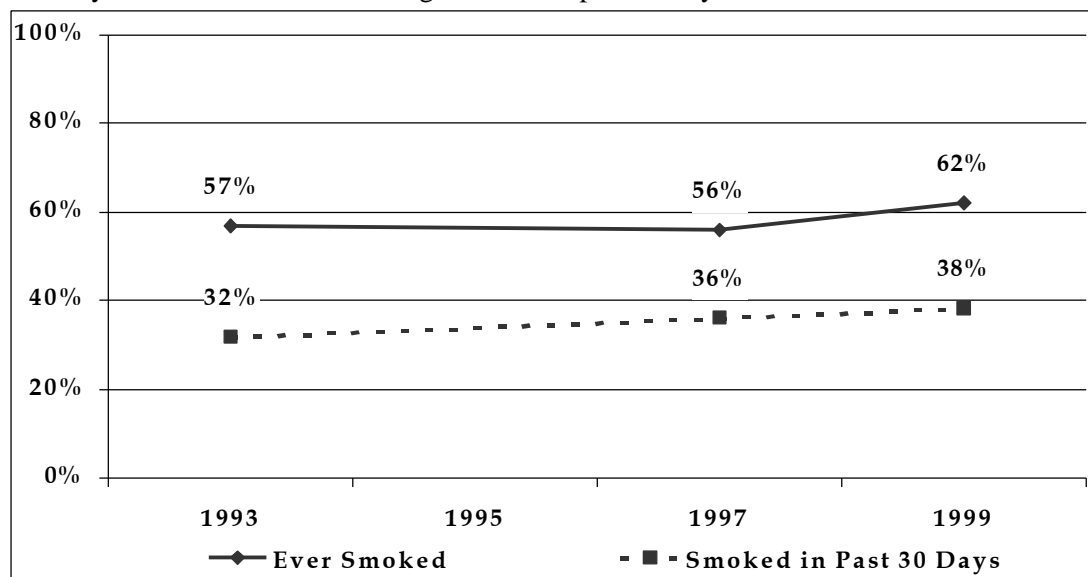
When 1997 National YRBS results and 1999 Wisconsin YRBS results are compared, two significant differences emerge. First, students in Wisconsin are more likely to report smoking cigarettes on 20 or more of the past 30 days than the national average (22 percent compared to 19 percent). Second, students in Wisconsin were much less likely to get their own cigarettes by buying them in a store or gas station than the national average (12 percent compared to 30 percent).

## Trends

There is a small but statistically significant increase between 1993 and 1999 in the likelihood that students ever smoked a whole cigarette in their lives, though most of the increase is between 1997 and 1999 (see Figure 4). This percentage rose from 57 percent in 1993 to 62 percent in 1999. Likewise, there is a small but statistically significant increase in the percentage of students who said that they smoked at all in the past 30 days. This percent rose from 32 percent in 1993 to 38 percent in 1999. There was, however, a large significant increase in the number of students who had ever smoked who said that they had tried to quit smoking, from 19 to 36 percent. There were no differences in the percentage of students who had used chewing tobacco or snuff in the past 30 days.

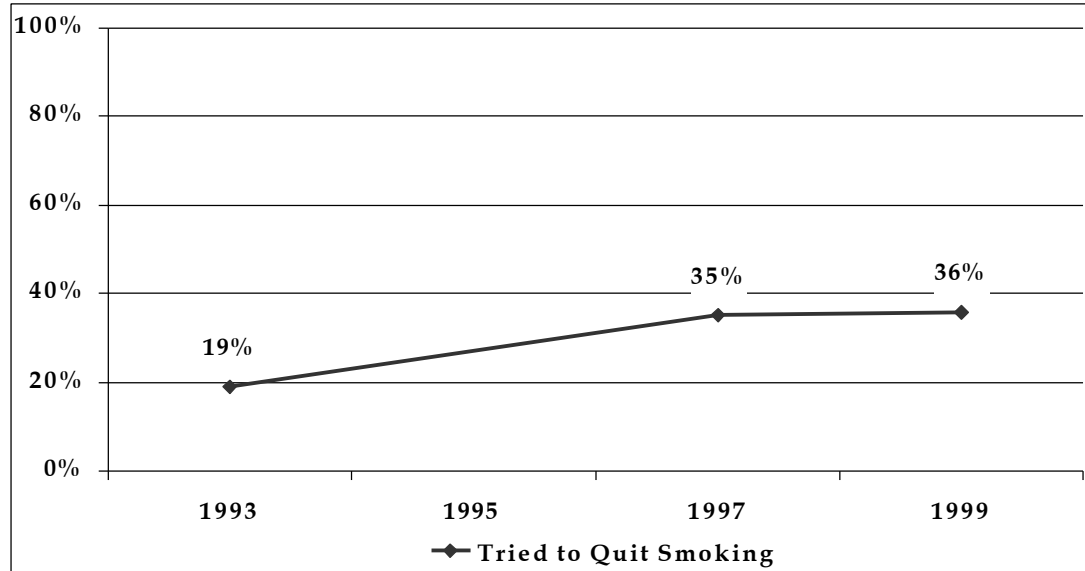
**Figure 4. Change in Smoking Behaviors: 1993-1999.**

Percentage of students who reported ever smoking at least one whole cigarette in their lives or who said that they had smoked at least one cigarette in the past 30 days.



**Figure 5. Change in Attempts to Quit Smoking: 1993-1999.**

Percentage of Students who reported having ever having tried to quit smoking.



## Comparisons by Demographic Groups

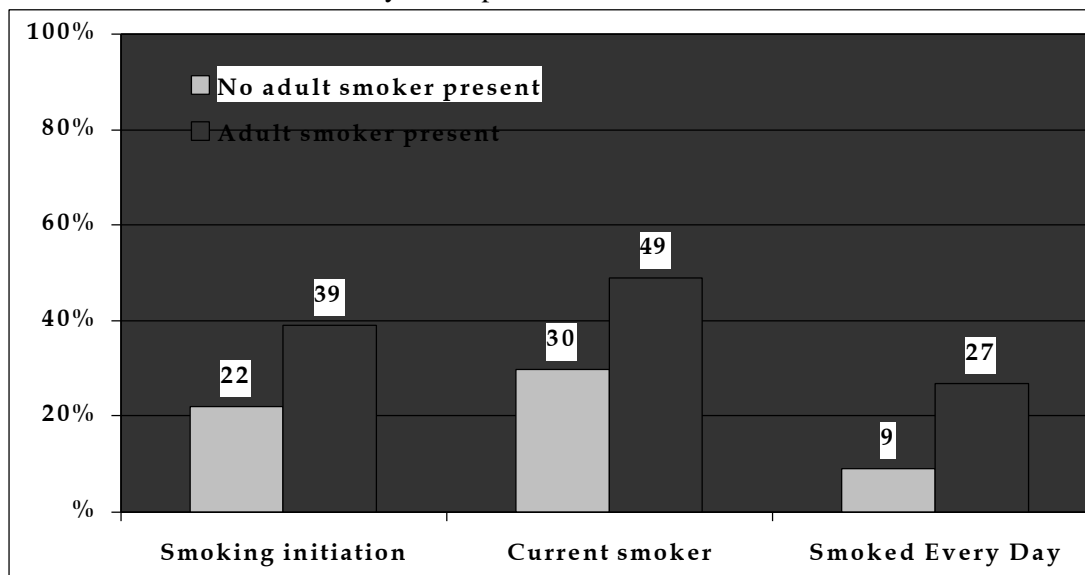
### *Adult smokers in the house*

Slightly more than four out of ten students reported that at least one adult member in their household smoked. There were no significant differences in the presence of adult smokers in the household by gender of student or grade level.

Having an adult smoker in the household significantly affected nearly every measure of tobacco use among high school students (see Figure 6). Students with an adult smoker in the house were more likely to have had their first cigarette at an earlier age, to have smoked at all in the past 30 days and to have smoked on every day in the past 30 than students without an adult smoker present in the house. They were also more likely to report smoking more cigarettes on the days when they smoked and to have smoked on school property more often. Interestingly, even when the analysis is limited to students who have ever smoked a cigarette in their lives, students from homes with an adult smoker present are significantly more likely to have reported ever having tried to quit smoking than students from a home without smokers. There were, however, no significant differences in the percentage who said they had used chewing tobacco or snuff in the past 30 days or in the way students reported getting their cigarettes between these two groups of students.

### **Figure 6. Effects of an Adult Smoker in the Home**

Percentage of all students who reported smoking their first whole cigarette before the age of 13; percentage of all students who reported smoking on at least one day in the past 30; percentage of all students who smoked on each day of the past 30.

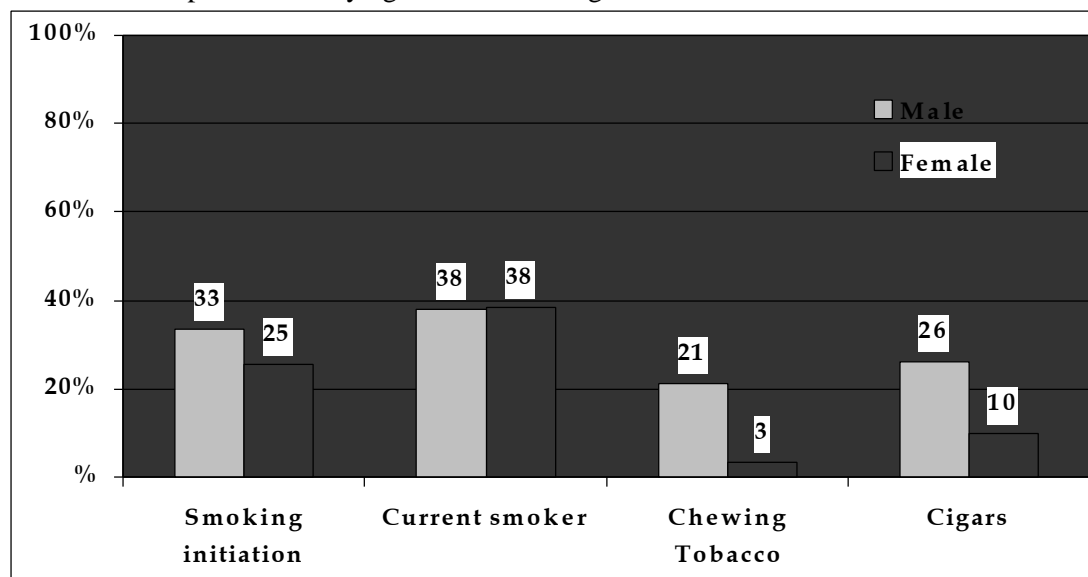


## Gender

There are significant differences in reported smoking and tobacco use by gender (see Figure 7). Forty-one percent of female students reported never having smoked a whole cigarette compared to 36 percent of male students. Male students were also more likely to report having their first cigarette at a younger age than female students. Nearly a third of male students reported smoking their first cigarette before the age of 13 compared to one-quarter of female students. The largest percentage of both male and female students reported smoking their first cigarette between the ages of 13 and 14.

### Figure 7. Tobacco Use by Gender

Percentage of all students who reported smoking their first whole cigarette before the age of 13; percentage of all students who reported smoking on at least one day in the past 30; percentage of all students who reported ever trying snuff or chewing tobacco.



However, there was no difference by gender among those who reported smoking currently. There was also no significant difference between the percentage of male and female students who said that they had smoked at least one cigarette in the past 30 days, in those who smoked on every day of the past 30, in the number of cigarettes that they had smoked per day, or in smoking on school property in the past 30 days. Male and female students were equally likely to report having tried to quit smoking. Interestingly, male students were more likely to purchase cigarettes in a store while female students were more likely to have someone else buy them.

As might be expected, significant differences are apparent between male and female students in using chewing tobacco or cigars. Twenty-one percent of male students reported using loose tobacco compared to only three percent of female students. Furthermore, nearly all female students who reported any use reported using loose tobacco on only one or two days in the past 30 while less than a third of male students claim this. Nearly a quarter of male students who used any loose tobacco in the past 30 days said they used it on 20 or more days. Ten percent of female students report smoking cigars, cigarillos or little cigars in the past 30 days compared to 26 percent of male students.

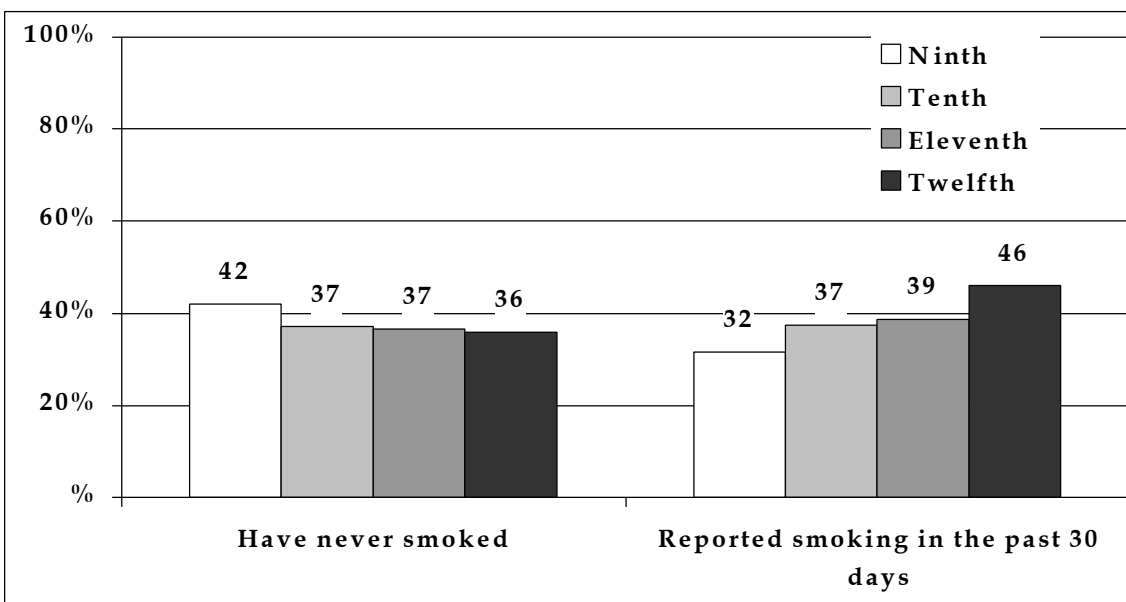
## Grade

As might be expected, smoking prevalence rates vary significantly by grade level. The percentage of students who have never smoked a whole cigarette steadily decreases from a high of 42 percent among ninth graders to a low of 36 percent among seniors (see Figure 8). Similarly, the percentage that reported

smoking in the past 30 days increases from 32 percent among ninth graders to 46 percent among seniors. Students in the upper grades are more likely to smoke every day. Upper class students are also more likely to smoke more cigarettes on the days they smoke. There is no significant difference in the percentage of students who claimed to have tried to stop smoking.

**Figure 8. Smoking Behavior by Grade.**

Percentage of all students who reported having never smoked and those who reported smoking in the past 30 days by grade.



There is a significant increase in the percent of students who say that they smoked on school property in the past 30 days. Thirteen percent of ninth grade students claim that they did this compared to 19 percent of seniors.

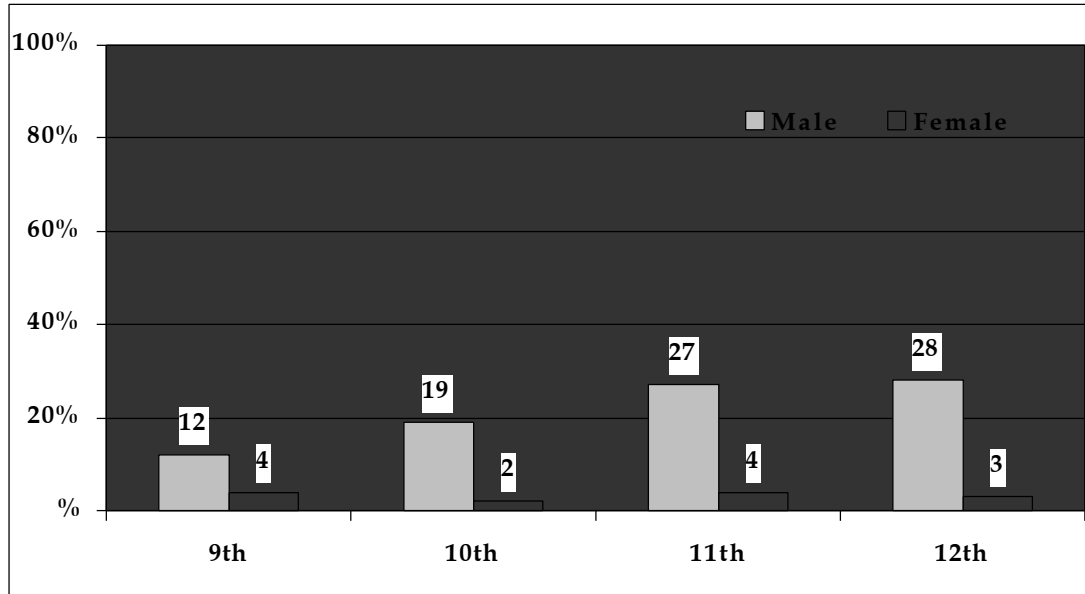
Students in the ninth and tenth grades are most likely to get their cigarettes by having someone else buy them for them or by borrowing them. In eleventh grade, the percentage of students buying their own cigarettes in a store or gas station increases significantly, from five percent in tenth grade, to 12 percent in eleventh, and again to 32 percent in twelfth. Correspondingly, twelfth graders are much less likely to get their cigarettes by having someone else buy them or borrowing them.



Though the percentage of female students claiming to have used chewing tobacco or snuff in the past 30 days is relatively constant over the four grade levels, the percentage for male students increases from 12 percent to 28 percent from ninth to twelfth grade (see Figure 9). The same trend is true for those who report smoking cigars, cigarillos or little cigars (see Figure 10). The percentage of female students claiming to have used cigars, cigarillos or little cigars in past thirty days is relatively constant over the four grade levels while the percentage increases from 19 percent of ninth grade to 30 percent of twelfth grade for male students.

**Figure 9. Chewing Tobacco Use by Gender and Grade.**

Percentage of all students who reported using chewing tobacco or snuff during the past 30 days by gender and grade.



**Figure 10. Cigar Use by Gender and Grade.**

Percentage of all students who reported smoking cigars, cigarillos or little cigars in the past 30 days by gender and grade.

